

Raised Bill 209

On behalf of CAACE, the Connecticut Association of Adult and Continuing Education programs, I, Richard Tariff, President of CAACE and Director of Adult Services for EASTCONN, support Raised bill 209, the Jobs First Employment Services Pilot. Currently, about 49% of Jobs First participants do not have a high school diploma. In these times of high unemployment and economic turmoil, CT residents without a high school diploma are finding it extremely difficult to find employment that leads to economic self sufficiency. Fewer than 10% of CT jobs do not require at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. And, as the economy tightens, even those jobs now are being filled by individuals with more education. A high school diploma would help make JFES clients more marketable. There are several barriers, however, that now stand in the way of that happening.

1. Not enough time: Many adults need more than 12 months to earn a GED, which is currently the maximum allowable for Jobs First vocational education program referrals.
2. Not enough referrals: JFES Case managers are not able to refer someone with a high counter (i.e., close to their 21 month time limit), or in an extension, to vocational education programs as becoming employed is the priority, even though employment is difficult to find without the diploma.

The proposed pilot would address the first barrier by extending the allowable time that Jobs First recipients can participate in vocational GED programs from 12 months to 24 months. It would address the second barrier by widening the eligibility window for JFES clients' referral to vocational educational programs. The results would be a statewide increase in number of JFES clients with a high school diploma with a higher employment rate.

I know firsthand how vocational education programs that include GED can make a real difference in JFES outcomes. I am not only here as CAACE President but also as Director of Adult Services for EASTCONN, one of the state's six regional educational service centers, where we have been serving the Jobs First population since 1998, when welfare reform was enacted. EASTCONN, through JFES funding from the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB), has run intensive GED vocational education programs for Jobs First participants for 15 years. Our region has been fortunate that our workforce board has chosen to set aside a small percentage of their Jobs First case management and job development funding to support this initiative that they feel is important. Our experience shows that this program has made a real difference for our Jobs First participants who earn their high school diploma.